

# Abuse prevention and recovery

## History of MCC's work

### COMPILER'S COMMENTS

**I**n Mennonite and Brethren in Christ churches and institutions, we have done intentional work on addressing domestic violence and sexual abuse for about 15 years. As we consider how much longer we need to do this work to effect change, the signs tell us we better prepare for a long journey.

It took centuries to develop strong cultures of violence. Many streets feel unsafe. Our entertainment industry teaches violence on a grand scale. Large percentages of our national budgets and personal savings investments financially support the violence of war. Reports on domestic violence worldwide show us that the most dangerous place for women and children to be is in the home.

Domestic violence and sexual abuse are long-term problems that need extensive long-term solutions. Like good yeast in bread, the effort needs to be in many layers in order to permeate every area.

How long will it take for a fundamental shift to occur and for us to change our practices within our church communities? How long will it take until all of our leadership will have an educated perspective around these issues with a fundamental commitment to safety for all? I've wondered if we can estimate the time it takes for the work we do to influence practitioners, leaders and the average person? Or, is there a way we can measure the impact of educational workshops and the ripple effects of personal experience?

We can only focus on so much at one time and are often stimulated into action by incidents. In our churches, we are often motivated to learn when abuse is disclosed to us or abuse happens to someone in our circles.

Perhaps we need to accept that we are finite and we can only do so much. The journey has a cyclical nature to it. We do the education, and we see some change when a church makes policies and practices that are responsible towards the issues. Then someone in the congregation says, "I didn't know people in our church struggled with issues of domestic violence and sexual abuse," and we invite them into the conversation and the education

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**In many cases, people affected by domestic violence and sexual abuse have said their faith in God was a source of strength while the church community was a barrier, contributing to the risks that come with domestic violence and sexual abuse.**

Elsie Wiebe Klinger works with MCC British Columbia's Domestic Violence and Sexual Abuse Program. She lives in Fort Langley, B.C.

goes around again. It's work that needs to be done over and over again, not for a few years but for centuries as an ongoing part of our journey.

In many cases, people affected by domestic violence and sexual abuse have said their faith in God was a source of strength while the church community was a barrier, contributing to the risks that come with domestic violence and sexual abuse. Incrementally, though, positive change is happening in our churches. Responses are frequently a bit different than what they may have been a decade ago. For example, a pastor will call and mentions he's been looking through our Web resources for guidance on how to respond to a disclosure of child abuse. The pastor has done some of the steps just as we listed and

now he wants some input on next steps. He is thankful that he has somewhere to call for guidance. The pastor also says that he has learned it could be deadly for him to counsel beyond his abilities and he values the support we offer.

The writers in this issue of *Women's Concerns Report* have taken part in the domestic violence and sexual abuse work initiated by MCC Women's Concerns. Their work consistently prepares, educates and empowers church communities to be helpful and caring towards these issues and reflects deep compassion and care for survivors of abuse. The writings reflect some of the various circles we've traveled in and the writings are all part of the yeast-like process of change in our long journey to non-violence.

—compiled by Elsie Wiebe Klinger

## FROM THE editor

**V**iolence is prevalent throughout society and occurs in many forms such as murder, rape, war, spouse abuse, child abuse, sexism and racism. This issue focuses on MCC's work to prevent violence against women and to assist those women who have suffered from this violence. MCC U.S. and MCC Canada Women's Concerns desks should celebrate the work they have done in this area.

The first issue of *Women's Concerns Report* that focused on family violence was the December 1978 issue (an earlier issue in 1977 was devoted to the topic of rape). That issue, part of a two-issue series which continued in January 1979, was the 23rd issue of the *Report*. The December 1978 issue focused primarily on spouse abuse. A short theology and history were given that explained the patriarchal systems that support violence against women. Stories from a legal aid attorney who worked with survivors of family violence and an article about the portrayal of women in comic strips were also included. The January 1979 issue focused on child abuse. The articles in that issue discussed the possible connection between the accepted use of physical force in child rearing and the abuse of children, abused children one day becoming perpetrators of violence in society and processes for dealing with child abuse cases. Space was also devoted to resources on family violence, profiles of child abuse and wife battering, and items of action for individuals and communities.

In a more recent issue of *Report* (November–December 2002), family violence was again the topic of discussion. This issue

**The MCC Committees on Women's Concerns believe that all women and men are made in God's image and called to do God's work. We strive to work for the dignity and self-development of Mennonite, Brethren-in-Christ and Mennonite Brethren women, and to encourage wholeness and mutuality in relationships between women and men.**

**Articles and views presented in *Women's Concerns Report* do not necessarily reflect the views of the Committees on Women's Concerns or Mennonite Central Committee.**

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**WOMEN'S CONCERNS REPORT USPS 367-790 is published bimonthly by MCC U.S. Women's Concerns, P.O. Box 500, 21 South 12th St., Akron, PA 17501-0500, fax 717-859-3875; and by MCC Canada Women's Concerns, 134 Plaza Drive, Winnipeg, MB R3T 5K9; fax 204-269-9875. Periodicals postage paid at Akron, PA.**

**POSTMASTER: Please send address changes to Report, P.O. Box 500, Akron, PA 17501-0500.**

**Subscription cost is \$15 U.S./\$18 Cdn. for one year or \$25 U.S./\$30 Cdn. for two years. Send all subscriptions, correspondence and address changes to Editor, MCC Women's Concerns, P.O. Box 500, Akron, PA 17501-0500; e-mail [tjh@mccus.org](mailto:tjh@mccus.org); telephone 717-859-3889; fax 717-859-3875. Canadian subscribers may pay in Canadian currency.**

**Visit our Web site at <http://www.mcc.org/us/womensconcerns>.**

**This newsletter is printed on recycled paper.**

was an attempt to move beyond helping victims and, instead, reinforced the need to work on prevention of abuse. One way to do this is to affirm a theology that opposes violence against women.

What does our Anabaptist peace theology say about violence against women? Unfortunately, not much. In the November–December 2002 issue, Beth Graybill said, “Our tradition of nonresistance has helped contribute to violence against women by implicitly encouraging women to accept abuse as Christ-like suffering, rather than to resist.” Carol Penner argued that “we will always talk about war . . . But the violence of sexism and racism is just as insidious in the lives of our college students and our churches and deserves equal billing with the violence of war.” Carolyn Holderread Heggen gave suggestions of what churches can do to make our homes and institutions safer. Some suggestions include “Make it known that all persons are of equal value in God’s eyes . . . Communicate that when violence occurs in the home, it is not a private matter but rather the concern of the entire congregation . . . Examine religious teachings that could contribute to interpersonal violence.” Efforts to address the gaps in Anabaptist peace theology and the efforts to work with victims of abuse, which the writers of this issue discuss, are both important in the work to address, confront and prevent family violence.

The past *Report* issues that I have highlighted are available for purchase. If you would like to see a list or purchase past

## From the desk

This column highlights events and resources relevant to, sponsored by, and coordinated by the Women’s Concerns desk.

- Join us at the “Gifts of the Red Tent: Women Creating,” a conference of North American Anabaptist Women Doing Theology, from May 16 to 18 at Eastern Mennonite University, Harrisonburg, Virginia. The staff of the MCC U.S. Women’s Concerns Desk, along with other women, have enjoyed planning this conference since early last year. North American Anabaptist Women Doing Theology conferences have been held biennially for the past 10 years, with alternating locations between Canada and the United States. The theme of this year’s conference is based on *The Red Tent* by Anita Diamant, and features a diverse group of presenters. For more information, visit <http://www.mcc.org/womendoingtheology>; or contact MCC US Women’s Concerns by e-mailing [tjh@mccus.org](mailto:tjh@mccus.org) or calling 717-859-3889.
- AIDS update: In the July–August 2002 issue of *Women’s Concerns Report*, we explored how the AIDS epidemic is affecting people around the world. Recently, it has been reported that women now make up about half of the adults infected with HIV worldwide. These women become infected primarily through sexual intercourse with infected men. In sub-Saharan Africa, the world’s worst-affected area, where nearly one in 11 adults are infected, women account for 58 percent of infections. The executive director of the United Nations AIDS agency, the agency issuing this report, says the shift towards female infections will ultimately increase the spread of HIV, because women can spread HIV through sex, childbirth and nursing. Though sub-Saharan Africa continues to have the most cases of HIV infections, the epidemic has been steadily spreading through Eastern Europe, Central and Southeast Asia, and China. —Emma Ross, “In a first, females are now half of HIV cases,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 11/27/2002 and Lawrence K. Altman, “Women catch up to men in global HIV cases,” *The New York Times*, 11/27/2002.

issues, you can visit our Web site or request a list in writing or by E-mail. The earliest issues of *Report* are only available through written or E-mail requests. Contact information can be found in the green box on the second page of this issue.

—Patricia Haverstick, Editor

# Experiences of women Looking at wife abuse in British Columbia

In 1993, 550 women responded to a *Women’s Concerns Report* survey ranking 21 issues that were of concern to them. Domestic violence was ranked first and sexual abuse ranked fourth. Obviously, women are concerned about these issues.

MCC has been working for many years in the area of domestic violence and sexual assault. Resource packets, educational

workshops and videos have been developed in addition to referral services and an abuse Web site. Much has been done to bring this problem to light and to work toward ending this unfortunate reality for many women. Still, there are voices that argue that abuse does not happen here, in our Mennonite community. Sadly, women have been abused, are being abused and will continue to be abused if

by Ruth Kampen

Ruth Kampen received her master's degree in Sociology in 1994, for which she wrote a thesis entitled "Submission, Silence and Shame: Mennonite Women's Experiences of Wife Abuse." Ruth is a member of the MCC British Columbia Women's Concerns Committee, lives in Abbotsford, British Columbia, and is currently busy working and raising her 4-year-old son.

**Still, there are voices that argue that abuse does not happen here, in our Mennonite community.**

we do not continue to make this reality known and support the important work that MCC does.

Isaac Block's book, *Assault on God's Image: Domestic Violence*, 1991, studied the incidence and severity of abuse in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Mennonite homes through a quantitative study. His research supported the fact that women were victims of various kinds of abuse within supposedly "peace-loving" homes. Moreover, he reported that people experiencing abuse did not turn to their pastors for help.

At the same time as Block was conducting his research, my awareness of, and subsequent interest in, domestic violence became very real while I was employed at a shelter for abused women. The horror, frustration and hope I experienced and saw in the women at the transition house created a desire within me to further explore the problem of wife abuse. By the end of the summer I knew that I wanted to write about this problem for my master's thesis. My desire to study Mennonite women's experiences came out of my conviction that these stories must be told. It was not acceptable to pretend that abuse did not happen in my home town, to women that I knew.

My research focused on the stories of nine formerly abused Mennonite women in the Fraser Valley in British Columbia, Canada. This research was conducted nearly 10 years ago. It provides historical insight into what women endured and what assistance they received. At that time, all of the women interviewed had been out of their abusive relationships for more than five years. For some of the older research participants, their abuse and their experiences seeking help occurred roughly 20 years prior. At that time, there was little recognition of the problem and few resources for pastors or lay persons. The women suffered in silence and in shame, too afraid to leave and even more afraid to ask for help.

The women experienced emotional, physical, sexual and psychological abuse at the hands of their husbands. Most people assume that the physical violence would be the worst to endure, when in fact, almost all women stated that it was the

emotional or psychological abuse that was the most difficult. This form of constant abuse and belittling was extremely detrimental to their self-esteem and sense of worth. The women were silent about their abuse for a long time but they eventually sought help from their churches. Unfortunately, most of the women were disappointed with how they were treated. The most extreme example was one woman being told that she should stay with her husband, even though she told the pastor that her husband had threatened to kill her. When this woman and her husband became separated, she was asked to leave the church. All of the women in this study received subtle and not so subtle messages from their churches that they were not only responsible for their problems but for remedying them as well. They were often blamed for what happened or blamed if they became divorced. Silence and shame were reinforced by the pastors' lack of understanding of the dynamics of abusive relationships.

Traditional theological teaching that focused on the man as the head of the house and encouraged women's submission were detrimental to the women I interviewed, as it justified their lower position and was used by their husbands' to support their husbands' abusive actions. Also, the Church's emphasis on forgiveness and reconciliation made the women's journey from victim to survivor a difficult one. Churches should teach forgiveness and reconciliation, but when it comes to abusive relationships, this theology must be carefully interpreted. The women forgave their husbands many times. In turn, these men used this theology against their wives and further victimized them. As one woman clearly explained, "The last person to forgive you is yourself."

The women were not pleased with the support or advice they received from the church; eight of the nine changed to larger, more liberal churches after their marriages ended. In these churches, they made new friends and felt supported, and not judged.

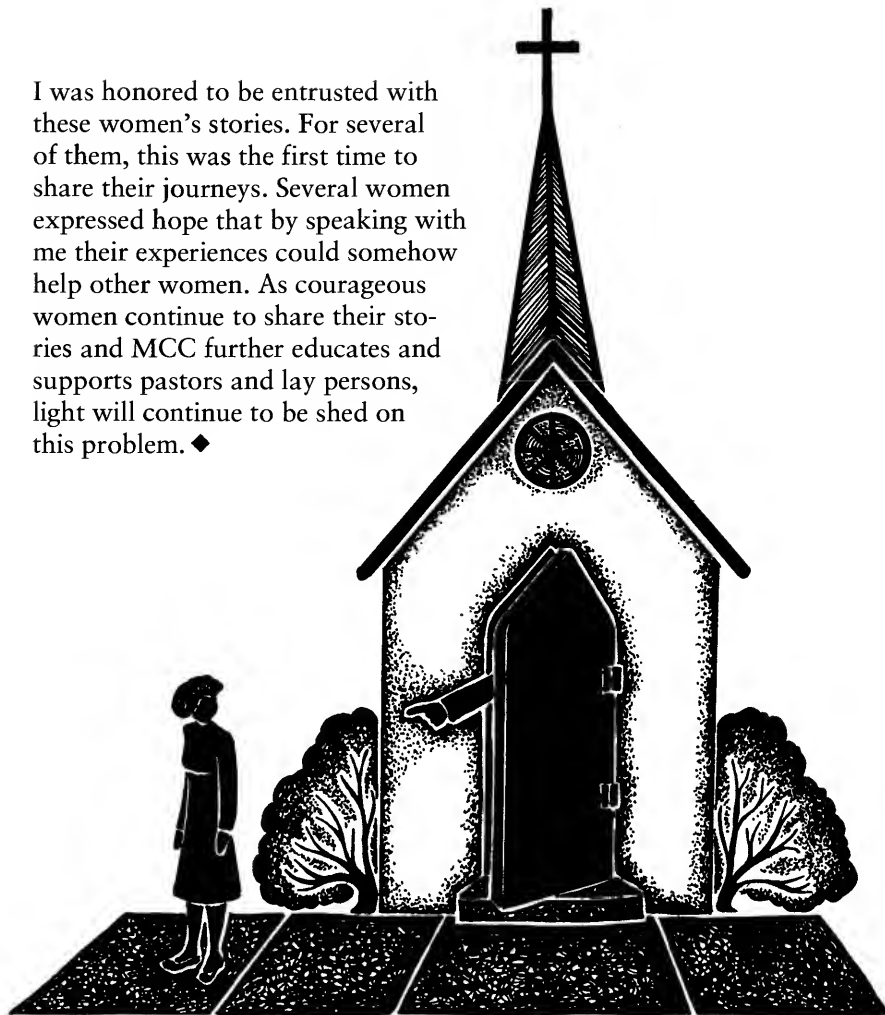
Although their church experiences were negative, the women did not allow this negativity to undermine their personal faith. As one woman made the distinction, "I hated religion, I hated people, but

I never hated God.” In fact, all of the women found that their faith was strengthened as a result of going through the abuse and the difficult time in their churches.

The women offered suggestions for ways that churches could change. They strongly supported more education for church leaders and more women in staff positions. They encouraged pastors to think about the language they use from the pulpit and remember that teachings on submission should be carefully explained.

The women I interviewed endured mistreatment by their husbands and their churches. What could have been a place of comfort and support was a place where guilt and shame were reinforced. Unfortunately the women had to deal with their problems alone, with little assistance from their pastors. Today, through the work of MCC and broader society, the silence and shame surrounding abuse is being broken. Abuse is no longer such a taboo topic. As one research participant stated, “The churches are trying. They have changed somewhat.”

I was honored to be entrusted with these women’s stories. For several of them, this was the first time to share their journeys. Several women expressed hope that by speaking with me their experiences could somehow help other women. As courageous women continue to share their stories and MCC further educates and supports pastors and lay persons, light will continue to be shed on this problem. ♦



## Domestic Violence and Sexual Abuse project in British Columbia

**T**he issues of domestic violence and sexual abuse have always been a priority for the MCC British Columbia (B.C.) Women’s Concern Committee. When the committee was formed in 1990, several incidents of professional sexual misconduct were exposed among a variety of Mennonite church-related institutions, not just in British Columbia but across North America. In most of those cases of professional sexual misconduct, there were many victims, often in more than one community. As dark secrets were exposed, victims of sexual misconduct gained courage to tell their stories. Hearing those stories gave others permission to also tell their stories.

Institutionally, Mennonite church related organizations didn’t know what to do with those disclosures. Our seminaries and colleges did not yet provide education on the issue, and Mennonite churches and institutions found themselves ill-prepared to deal with this crisis. We didn’t even have the language with which to talk about professional sexual abuse.

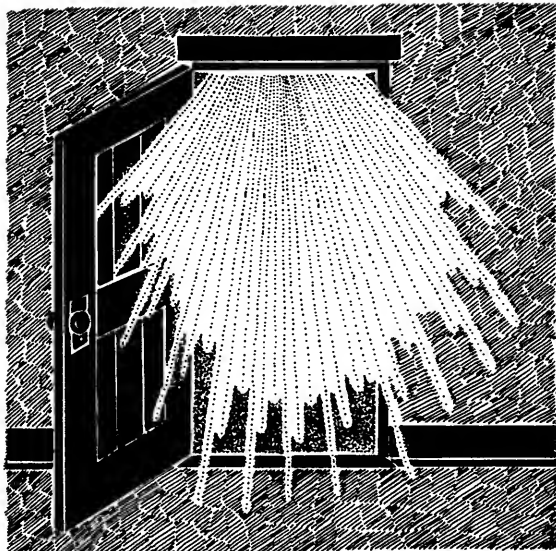
A survey of women constituents provided another major motivator for the MCC B.C. Women’s Concerns Committee to focus attention on these painful issues. Work began on prevention and education as part of the solution.

**by Elsie Wiebe Klinger**

Elsie Wiebe Klinger works with MCC British Columbia’s Domestic Violence and Sexual Abuse Program. She lives in Fort Langley, B.C. Elsie is the compiler for this issue of *Women’s Concerns Report*.

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As these dark secrets were exposed, victims of sexual misconduct gained courage to tell their stories. Hearing those stories gave others permission to also tell their stories.



## Book resources on abuse

These resources are recommended by Elsie Wiebe Klinger, compiler for this issue of *Women's Concerns Report*. She works at MCC British Columbia's Domestic Violence and Sexual Abuse Program.

***Healing the Hurting***, edited by Catherine Clark Kroeger and James R. Beck (1998).

This book shows how to challenge the thinking that employs Scripture to justify abuse, and offers real-life examples of how to stop the cycle of domestic violence—giving victims, counselors, and ministers a guide to finding hope beyond tragedy.

***Sexual Abuse in Christian Homes and Churches***, by Carolyn Holderread Heggen (1987).

Carolyn illustrates how a congregation can begin to work at healing the wounds of sexual abuse and prevent further abuse. The congregation is challenged to offer comfort, understanding, and healing to victims, while at the same time confronting abusers in love. There is also a Spanish language version available. See below.

***Abuso Sexual en Hogares e Iglesias Cristianas*** por Carolyn Holderread Heggen (1987).

Carolyn explica como una congregación puede comenzar a ayudar a las víctimas a sanar el daño causado por el abuso sexual y como prevenir para que el abuso no se repita. Se le reta a la congregación a que ofrezca aliento, comprensión y sanidad a las víctimas, a la misma vez que la congregación confronte con amor al abusador. También hay una versión disponible en Inglés.

***Keeping the Faith: Guidance for Christian Women Facing Abuse***, by Marie M. Fortune (1987).

This booklet is a concise response to common religious questions raised by victims/survivors of family violence and is a valuable resource for shelters, counselors and pastors.

***When Love Hurts—A Woman's Guide to Understanding Abuse in Relationships***, by Jill Corey and Karen McAndless-Davis (2000).

Love is meant to be supportive. But what happens when you are hurt by the one you love? This book will help women interpret their relationships in valuable new ways. Drawing on their own wisdom and the wisdom of many women who share their experience, *When Love Hurts* helps women find the answers they're looking for.

The MCC B.C. Women's Concerns Committee worked hard at education and skills training in our constituency. Some members of the committee were trained advocates who provided a voice and support for victims of abuse, volunteering countless hours of their time. They listened to stories, attended meetings, and advised churches on appropriate responses that could assist in creating healthy churches and institutions that were safe for all. Congregations and church conferences held workshops and conferences on sexual abuse and domestic violence.

Many church leaders and congregations hesitated to enter into these discussions. They seemed to fear that if we talked about sexual abuse and domestic violence, it would somehow devour us. It was clear that on-going education and conversations about sexual abuse and domestic violence had to remain part of the focus for the Committee. In 1993, subcommittees were formed to work on domestic violence, education, and awareness; and then, in 1994, a proposal for a Voluntary Service placement providing "Resource and Referral Service" was accepted by the MCC B.C. Board.

When interviewing for this new position, the second round of interviews brought forth a highly qualified applicant, a Presbyterian minister. She was a survivor of domestic violence at the hands of her pastor husband. When her congregation heard of her plans, they decided to fund a service position themselves. Consequently, new resources emerged for Christians in our area, but not under MCC B.C. auspices.

Following this, Voices for Non-Violence from Winnipeg, Manitoba, was invited to train advocates in cases of pastoral sexual abuse. To date, conference leaders have not utilized their services.

In 1998, Wai, Young, & Associates were contracted to do an assessment to ascertain whether there was a continuing need for a Domestic Violence and Sexual Abuse (DVSA) project in British Columbia. The report made a variety of recommendations and was the pre-cursor to MCC B.C.'s current DVSA staff position and program.



A year later, the job description was revised into a half-time staff position with a program budget. A DVSA network of contacts in British Columbia constituent churches was formed to assist with distributing information. During the summer of 1999, a voluntary service worker coordinated a consultation for pastors and church leaders on domestic violence and sexual abuse. Before the end of the year, the staff position was filled and a DVSA Advisory Committee was formed as a subcommittee of MCC B.C. Women's Concerns.

The Advisory Committee is made up of men and women professionals working in the field of domestic violence and sexual abuse and are committed to constituent churches. British Columbia's DVSA program provides referral services, educational resources and training workshops for church leaders, congregations and other groups. This initiative is a service to the church in response to requests from pastors who had no training in these issues and were unfamiliar with secular agencies or were reluctant to use them.

One of the major educational tools is a Web site on abuse which has step-by-step guidelines on what to do when one gets a disclosure of abuse or is experiencing abuse. Members of MCC Canada's Women's Network are presently working at making the Web site a national resource with links to provincial or regional resources. Visit the site at <http://www.mcc.org/bc/abuse>.

The responses to the Web site have been very positive. Several pastors are encouraged to find there is a place of support for them when they are unsure how to respond. When workshops are offered at constituent conference meetings, they are almost always full of pastors and church delegates. Survivors of abuse frequently e-mail or call to express their relief and gratitude in finding a Christian organization addressing these issues and they encourage us in our work.

Though the topic will remain a difficult one to address, and some may even ignore the issues, there is also some positive progress we can celebrate. We have found there are many open doors for educating.

Many people want to learn how our congregations can become safer, healthier places to address domestic violence and sexual abuse. More church leaders are learning that there are places to go for support and are gaining skills to handle abuse in responsible, safe ways.

It is clear that there is still much work to do. The work of educating our churches about domestic violence and sexual abuse and supporting victims of abuse continues to be necessary. We are hopeful that our services will continue to be used regularly and, as a result, some homes and congregations will be safer and healthier and some lives will be saved. ♦

Many people want to learn how our congregations can become safer, healthier places to address domestic violence and sexual abuse.

## Video resources on abuse

These resources are recommended by Elsie Wiebe Klinger, compiler for this issue of *Women's Concerns Report*. She works at MCC British Columbia's Domestic Violence and Sexual Abuse Program.

***Domestic Violence: What Churches Can Do***, from the Center for the Prevention of Sexual and Domestic Violence, 2002.

This one-hour program for use in Christian education offers basic information on family violence, as well as concrete ideas about how congregations can become involved in prevention and can offer a safe space for battered women in their church to come forward. Includes a 24-page study guide and a package of awareness brochures. For more information, visit <http://www.cpsdv.org>.

***Broken Vows: Religious Perspectives on Domestic Violence***, from the Center for prevention of Sexual and Domestic Violence, 1994.

*Broken Vows* shows how religious teachings have been misused in ways that perpetrate abuse, and gives positive suggestions about how a church, synagogue or other religious community can respond to abuse and work to end family violence. There is also a Spanish language version available. See below. For more information, visit <http://www.cpsdv.org>.

***Promesas Quebrantadas: Perspectivas Religiosas Acerca de la Violencia Doméstica***, 1994.

*Promesas Quebrantadas* presenta la historia de seis mujeres que provienen de diversas religiones y que han sido golpeadas. Este video demuestra como algunas creencias religiosas han sido utilizadas para justificar el abuso contra las mujeres. A su vez, el video presenta sugerencias de como las comunidades religiosas pueden ayudar a las mujeres golpeadas y colaborar para poner fin a la violencia doméstica. También hay una version disponible en Inglés. <http://www.cpsdv.org>.

***Love—All That And More . . .***, from the Center for Prevention of Sexual And Domestic Violence, 2001.

This video informs youth about the elements that make up healthy relationships and increases awareness and understanding about abuse. Motivates teen viewers to seek relationships based on equality and mutual respect. For more information, visit <http://www.cpsdv.org>.

# At last!

by Moniqua Acosta

Moniqua Acosta works part time for Big Brothers Big Sisters of Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, and is a member of the MCC U.S. Committee on Women's Concerns.

**The first ever Conference on Preventing Family Violence for Latino Mennonites, and I had the privilege of being there with 90 other sisters and brothers interested in investing in the cause.**

**M**ay of 2001 was a ground breaking event. The first ever Conference on Preventing Family Violence for Latino Mennonites, and I had the privilege of being there with 90 other sisters and brothers interested in investing in the cause. This type of event had been sitting on the back burner for too long.

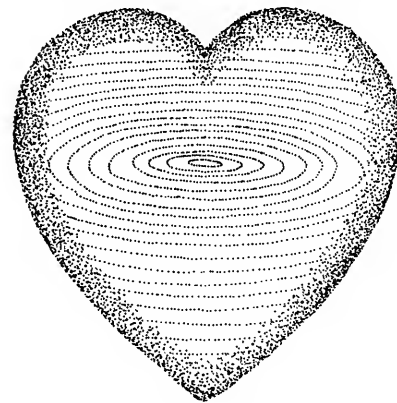
Our churches were not ready or willing to touch such a delicate issue, and even less ready to deal with the issue within our churches. But by the grace of our Creator, and some strong dedicated angels who did not let the matter die, we had our conference. All were touched in a special way, and left with the desire and commitment to serve and educate their own communities on preventing family violence.

I know in my heart this was a success because of all of the ripple effects that took place. After the conference, I began a temporary position with Women's Concerns and, along with the Women's Concerns staff and other MCC U.S. Peace and Justice staff, I began to make contacts. Through hard work and commitment by many people, regional events were able to take place in Florida, New York, British Columbia, California, and Texas. These events were a beginning point in the communities, and all agree that we have a long way to go. How-

ever, we are excited about our churches' interest in addressing this important issue. Many were surprised to hear the personal testimonies of church members who are affected by family violence. For those affected, the conferences served as new sources of support, support they felt they would never receive from the church.

I am very encouraged by all of this, and am confident that we will only see positive changes from continuing this work against family violence. We are off to a wonderful start. Adelante Hermanas!

Recently, I have edited, with Women's Concerns staff, the video that was recorded of the May 2001 Conference. It is available for those who are interested in using it for future conferences or even in Sunday School settings. I am very proud to be a small part of this very beneficial cause to prevent family violence. ♦



## Exposing ourselves to the light of truth telling

by Carolyn Holderread Heggen

**W**hen first asked by Mennonite Publishing House to consider writing a book on sexual abuse, I declined. I had just finished writing a dissertation and dreaded the thought of being tied to more research and writing. I was proud, however, that my denomination was willing to address this painful issue. When it became clear that no one else was fighting for the

chance to author the proposed book and it was clarified that I would have the authority to explain the dynamics of abuse as I had come to understand them, I agreed.

While I knew many accounts of abuse from my clinical practice in New Mexico, I decided to include in the book only stories from Mennonite and Brethren in Christ people. I knew from travels and



speaking around the U.S. and Canada that we as a church had a serious problem with sexual abuse, and I wanted to be able to say to my church and my people, "We *do* have a problem and *these* are our stories!" Through MCC Committees on Women's Concerns and other Mennonite networks, I solicited stories, sent questionnaires and did interviews with denominational women who identified themselves as having been sexually abused by a Christian perpetrator (while I know there are also male victims, I felt those stories needed to be received and analyzed by a man). I was overwhelmed by the number of responses I received and by the willingness of women to share their painful stories of violation and abuse. Many told me this was the first time they had talked to anyone about their experiences. Many thanked me for caring, for asking and for writing.

Although painful to hear, I felt honored to have these stories entrusted to me. When I solicited poetry, prayers and lamentations that had been written as part of women's healing journeys, I was touched and inspired by these women's creative responses to their pain and by their willingness to share their insights and creativity with others. On the other hand, at times I struggled deeply with despair and anger that so many of our Mennonite homes, churches and institutions had been places of destructive violation and abuse of power. Writing this book resulted in a crisis of faith. To balance this I forced myself to read and reread the Gospel accounts which illustrate how Jesus lovingly and respectfully related to women, children and those without social power.

It has been almost ten years since the publication of *Sexual Abuse in Christian Homes and Churches*. In those years, MCC, church seminaries, denominational conferences, and groups of survivors have organized events which focus attention on learning more about the topic and provide healing rituals and experiences for those wounded by abuse. In May of 2001, the first Anabaptist conference in Spanish which focused on domestic violence and sexual abuse was held in Akron, Pennsylvania, with people coming from the U.S., Canada and Latin America. In 2002, a publishing company in Colombia came

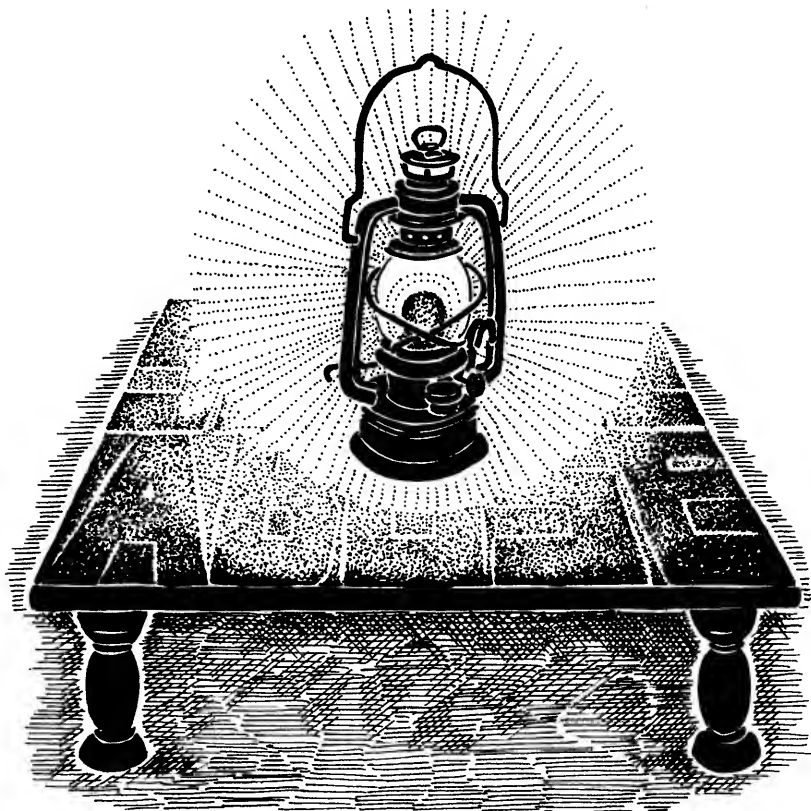
out with a Spanish version of *Abuso Sexual en Hogares e Iglesias Cristianas*. This project was supported by MCC.

In the last decade, much hard work and courageous commitment by many people have gone into exploring the issue of abuse. There have been brave people addressing this sin in many ways. Some have courageously told their personal stories. Others have planned conferences and organized gatherings of survivors. Some have served on accountability/restoration teams and worked with perpetrators. Others have preached, spoken out, listened, written and counseled. Has it made any difference?

I believe the church and individuals now have a language with which to discuss abuse. Because we have a vocabulary to talk about abuse of power and violation of boundaries, it is easier for victims to know why their experiences were wrong and to name them as evil. Because of open discussions about the issue, victims now seem to know people to whom they can go for help and support. Those who once abused and violated with impunity can no longer count on their sinful behavior being

Carolyn Holderread Heggen is a psychotherapist and is the author of *Sexual Abuse in Christian Homes and Churches* and *Abuso Sexual en Hogares e Iglesias Cristianas*. She and her husband Richard are serving with MCC in Nepal where she is Care Coordinator and leader of the pastoral care team of United Mission to Nepal.

**Writing this book resulted in a crisis of faith. To balance this I forced myself to read and reread the Gospel accounts which illustrate how Jesus lovingly and respectfully related to women, children and those without social power.**



**While I know there are also male victims, I felt those stories needed to be received and analyzed by a man.**

kept secret. Church conferences and leadership groups have developed policies and procedures for receiving complaints of sexual misconduct against ordained people and have developed a variety of models for trying to call to accountability and restore to fellowship clergy who have been found guilty of inappropriate behavior.

We still have much to learn about how to live together in ways that reflect mutual

care and respect. There is still a big gap between our formal peace theology as a denomination and the reality of many of our interpersonal relationships. But by being exposed to the light of truth telling, the sin of sexual abuse has lost some of its grip on us. May God give us the courage and energy to keep working together to develop families, congregations, institutions and a world that are safe for all and are a reflection of Kingdom values. ♦

# Sensible homemakers

by Carol Penner

Carol Penner lives in Vineland, Ontario, where she enjoys spending time with her family, hiking on the Bruce Trail and worshipping at First Mennonite Church. She works part-time as a chaplain at a hospital and does freelance writing.

*For a number of years, I worked as Family Violence staff person for MCC Ontario. As part of my responsibilities, I preached in many churches about this theme. Here is one of the sermons that I preached.*

## Peace Begins at Home

Sermon Text: Titus 2

I think that taking peace down to its essential building blocks—one person relating to another person—is something that we need to consciously do. As Mennonites, we have a peace position—we like to call ourselves peacemakers. Are we equally as comfortable with the concept of being homemakers? Have we been as diligent about our peace witness in our intimate relationships as in the larger world arena?

In Titus 2, Paul is instructing Titus on how to build healthy relationships in the church family on the island of Crete. Interestingly, Paul uses the word “sensible” five times in various forms in this chapter. The word in Greek means to be of a sound mind, to practice self-control, to be temperate, to be moderate and to be prudent. Different translations of the Bible use all of these terms. These words suggest that there is a struggle inside us. We need to practice self-control, to make sure that what comes out is peaceful. We need to be aware, sensible of what is inside of us. We need to try to be sensible homemakers.

Being sensible is sometimes very difficult. I took my four-year-old son out for lunch. It started as a good sort of outing for us. But he got more and more fidgety. He started taking my purse and throwing it on the ground. He got out of his seat and started running around the restaurant. After repeated appeals for him to sit down, I finally had to catch him and hold him so he wouldn’t run again. So, then he started kicking and hitting me. I took him kicking and screaming out of the restaurant, and there we sat in the car both absolutely furious with each other.

Looking back I soberly reflect that there was a struggle inside of me. Part of me knew the whole discipline thing. Be firm, talk to him about consequences for his actions. But part of me was just furious. It had been a humiliating experience for me, there were many people I knew in the restaurant. He had obviously been out of control and I felt it had reflected poorly on me. This was supposed to be a good time. He had spoiled it all. I was so furious I certainly felt like just venting my frustration by hitting him again and again.

I thought about doing it.

In that situation I managed to be self-controlled enough not to hit him. And in fact, within ten minutes of getting in the car, he had fallen fast asleep. I hadn’t realized how very tired he was, but then I remembered he’d gone to bed very late the night before. I began to wonder whether I had realistic expectations of his ability to han-

**But if we are honest, we have to admit that the faces of the survivor, and the faces of the perpetrator of abuse, are not strangers’ faces. They are the faces of the people next to us, they could be our own face.**

dle being in a restaurant. He had looked forward to our lunch out—ending the lunch before dessert was likely a severe enough punishment. In the end, just having terminated the lunch was probably the right thing to have done.

He may have been out of control, but he's just a child, and I needed to be realistic about his capabilities. What was most significant about the experience was how close I came, as a responsible adult, to being out of control.

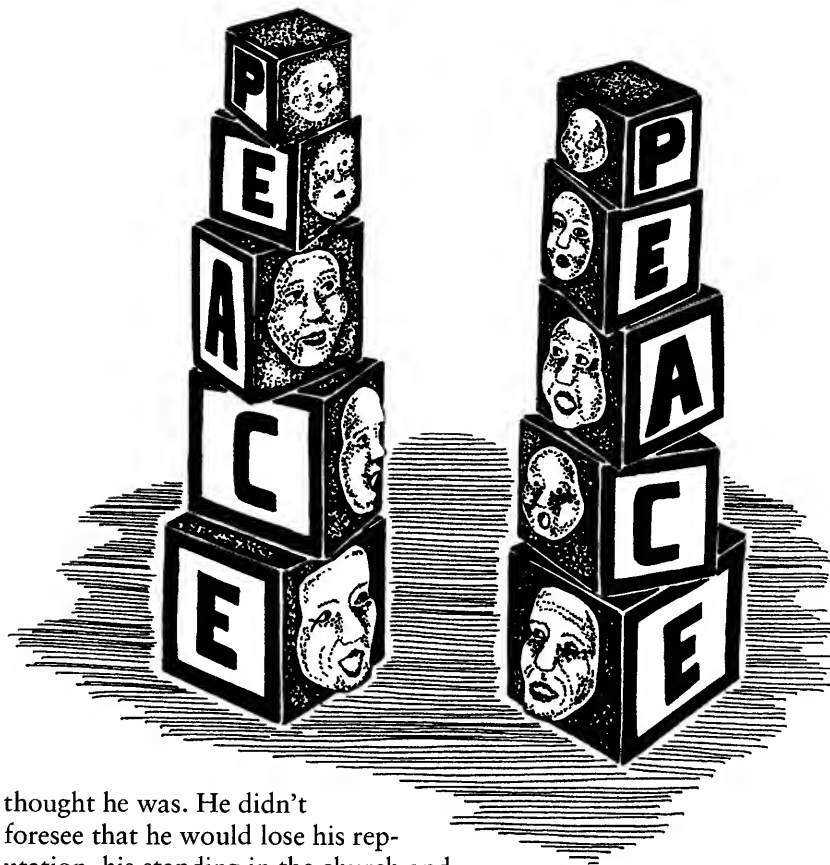
I share this story because it's one of many close calls I've faced as a parent. Some situations I've been successful at resisting, and some not. I share this story to illustrate that in being peacemakers, we have to start in our own homes, in our own minds. All of our actions must come out of self-control, not blind emotion. Sometimes this is an extremely difficult task.

How much conscious work do we do in providing parents and caregivers with the tools they need to be loving parents?

Sensibleness is something that we need right here in the church and in our families. I know this from personal experience. In our extended family, two women have revealed that their father sexually abused them through all of their teenage years. The father initially denied and then downplayed what he had done, but a year after the accusations were made, he finally admitted that he had committed incest with both his daughters.

Even now the immediate family and the whole extended family is still reeling from these facts. Over and over again, I've heard people saying, "It doesn't make sense. Here is a person who we've all respected, who has been the kindest, most wonderful Christian man, a deacon in the church, and all this time, he was sexually abusing his daughters."

Obviously, it wasn't sensible to allow himself to touch a child for his own self-gratification. He should have been able to foresee the consequences of his actions for his daughters, who have gone through years and years of therapy and anguish. He didn't foresee the consequences on his wife and other children, who suddenly realized that this man is not who they



thought he was. He didn't foresee that he would lose his reputation, his standing in the church and wider community. There has been so much pain. Everyone is hurt, all because of one person's lack of self-control.

Temptations to hurt people in our family may seem like something out there that happens to other people. But if we are honest, we have to admit that the faces of the survivor, and the faces of the perpetrator of abuse, are not strangers' faces. They are the faces of the people next to us, they could be our own face.

And so it is sensible that as a church community we need to encourage each other in every way we can to be good homemakers. We need to talk consciously about making our personal relationships arenas for peacemaking.

In our churches we need letters like this one that Paul has written to Titus. Letters, whether written or spoken or lived, that encourage us to live sensibly. We need communities that give us models of how to do this most effectively. And we need communities that hold us accountable when we see each other struggling and failing to use our power in a responsible way.

Our goal as Christians can be to have churches full of sensible homemakers. Let that be an integral part of our peace witness in the world. ♦

**We need communities that hold us accountable when we see each other struggling and failing to use our power in a responsible way.**

# Valentine's Day Hope

## A healing story for children's worship

by Lois Siemens

Lois Siemens has spent the last 13 years working at issues of worship and says, "It is more like creative playtime as you look at a text and what the speaker is going to focus on and fitting all the threads of the service together. It can be invigorating." Lois served on MCC British Columbia Women's Concerns for 7 years and is presently working towards a Masters of Divinity degree at Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary in Elkhart, Indiana.

**Valentine's Day landed on a Sunday and I was invited to prepare the children's worship time. Love? How could I portray love with these hopeless, lonely holes in my heart?**

**V**alentine's Day landed on a Sunday and I was invited to prepare the children's worship time. Absolutely not! I was emerging from a long grief over the losses I experienced due to sexual abuse and my hope was tenuous and fragile. Love? How could I portray love with these hopeless, lonely holes in my heart? But the curious thing was that when I started adding up experiences of love, I found a whole page full of incidents. How could that be? How could this punched-out, slow-healing heart hold any love? The answer to that question developed into the following worship time for children.

*What you will need:* a lunch size paper bag, colored cut-out paper hearts to fill the bag (I used construction paper, all colors, and cut them 1" to 1½"), a small cloth about 12" square or round (any color or pattern).

*How many people:* There are two ways to do this. You may choose to do the activity by yourself, or perhaps you may prefer to have a friend help you with the tearing, pouring, etc. Personally, I prefer two people, as this is an emotional topic and I hold my nervousness in my hands.

*Begin:* by opening the bag and telling the children that we are going to pretend this paper bag is like our heart. Talk about the ways our hearts are hurt at the age level of the children in front of you (e.g., when your brother or sister breaks your favorite toy, when you are called a name you do not like, when somebody pushes you on the playground). As you talk, crunch the bag or tear a small hole in the bottom.

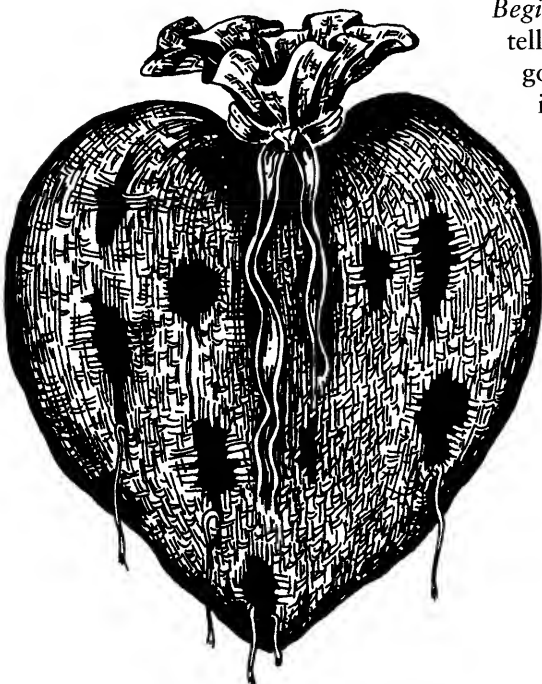
Talk about your own experience in general terms. As you speak, tear different sized pieces out of the bottom and a very short way up the sides of the bag. If you can, tear some holes only part way, like a flap, so you can put it back.

*Retell this story in your own words:* When I was young, I was hurt. . . and there were a few times when I was hurt very badly. My heart had so many holes. Some of them healed (*close a hole with the flap*) and some of them did not. I knew that I needed love to heal but it did not work.

You see, every time someone loved me, the love would fall out (*pause and pour some of the hearts into the bag and watch them fall out of the holes in the bottom*). I became very sad and angry too. Then I prayed, and talked to a friend I trusted. Some people prayed for me and we asked God for help. And this is what God did.

(*Take the cloth, place it inside the bag as if you were lining the bag, and then show the children*) God did an amazing thing! God put a lining in my heart. So you see, the holes are still here and they are being healed slowly. But you see what happens now (*pour hearts into the bag*) . . . the love that people gave me stays with me! So now there is enough for healing and there is often enough to go around (*Pour hearts so they spill out the top, take a few and sprinkle over the heads of the children, look the children in the eyes, and smile. The janitor might not appreciate paper on the floor, but it acts as a blessing for the children*).

*End:* with a short prayer thanking God for healing, and for those who give and receive love; ask God to heal any holes/hurts in the children's hearts and line them so love can stay. End the prayer by stretching your hand over them: "May God bless you with friendship and keep you safe. Amen." ♦



# Voices for Non-Violence

## Canadian Women Respond to Family Violence in Their Communities

### May all of our flaming voices never be silenced

*May all of our flaming voices never be silenced*

May our vision become your vision.  
May the seeds of our work  
when bathed in sunlight and nourishment  
grow to produce the sweet fruit of justice  
with the fragrance of true peace.

As we share this light  
may it not simply be the passing of  
a mission  
from one body to another  
but represent a swell  
in the voices calling for an end to violence.

*May all of our flaming voices never be silenced*

As God spoke light into the world at  
the time of creation  
may our voices  
speak light into a world of darkness  
and abuse.

Give us the courage to name the evil  
to expose it and address it.  
Give us the strength  
to walk with the wounded  
to share their pain  
and become their voice.

Give us the endurance  
to work towards justice for the weak  
and vulnerable  
in a world where power and strength  
are worshiped.

May God's grace be ever present  
to open blind eyes  
to heal wounded souls  
and mend broken lives  
to bring restoration, reconciliation  
where there is brokenness and grief.

*Amen.*

(This litany was written by Judith Snowden as part of a Litany of Celebration January 2000 when Voices for Non-Violence was officially received as a program of MCC Manitoba.)

The vision for the ministry of Voices for Non-Violence was begun in the late 1980s by Mennonite women, who through their work with Mennonites and non-Mennonites witnessed first-hand the horrific abuse that some women and children experienced in their families, communities and churches. At that time, the Mennonite Church in Manitoba minimally acknowledged domestic abuse, physical violence and abuse by people in leadership positions. From this experience emerged a pioneering group of women who sought to do something about what they perceived as a serious problem within and outside of the Manitoba Mennonite communities. They understood this problem to be both social and spiritual. They believed that as Christians with an Anabaptist perspective, they were called to work towards non-violent relationships based on mutuality and respect as modeled by Jesus Christ.

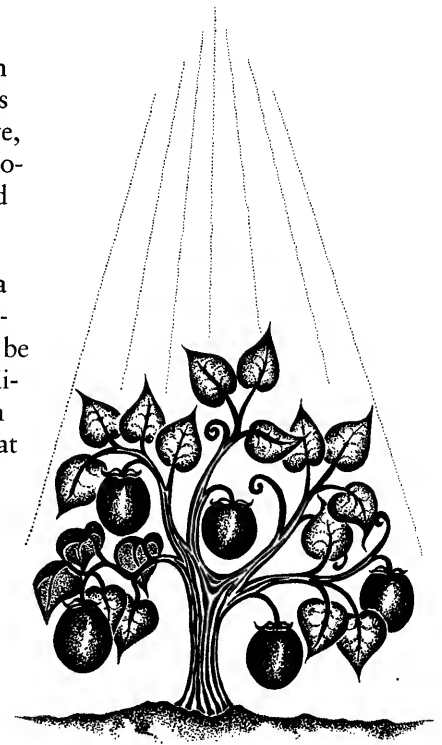
In 1990, MCC Manitoba responded to a request to fund a needs assessment. Concerned Mennonites discussed what could be done to initiate healing for the many individuals experiencing the pain of abuse in their families. It soon became evident that abuse is an issue within the Mennonite

by Eleanor Epp-Stobbe

Eleanor Epp-Stobbe is the coordinator of Voices for Non-Violence. This is a program of Mennonite Central Committee Manitoba.

### Voices for Non-Violence

- works with pastors, congregations, and conferences in the process of intervention in reported cases of abuse
- promotes awareness and application of a restorative justice approach to domestic violence and sexual abuse
- provides assistance to persons and families who have experienced abuse
- works together with other community resources in addressing the problem of abuse
- advocates positive family life with resources and presentations
- offers workshops and educational seminars
- promotes written materials, audio-visuals, workshop outlines, worship materials, etc. from our resource library
- provides support services (support groups, advocacy, etc.) for those affected by domestic violence and abuse



## Women in church leadership

**Teresa Dutchersmith was ordained as Pastor of Faith Mennonite Church in Goshen, Indiana, on December 15, 2002.**

**Emma Frederick, with her husband Mark, accepted a one-year interim assignment at Deep Run East Mennonite Church in Perkaspie, Pennsylvania.**

**Cynthia Lapp was ordained for ministry at Hyattsville Mennonite Church in Hyattsville, Maryland, on November 17, 2002.**

**Ruth (Shank) Martin was ordained by Mennonite Church Eastern Canada on December 8, 2002. She works as Coordinator of Pastoral Care Services for Tri-County Mennonite Homes in New Hamburg, Ontario.**

**Dawn Ranck accepted an Associate Pastor position at Plains Mennonite Church in Hatfield, Pennsylvania.**

**Tamara Shantz began serving as Youth Worker at Waterloo-Kitchener United Mennonite Church in Waterloo, Ontario, in the fall of 2002.**

community and many church leaders feel inadequately equipped to respond effectively. Later that year, MCC Manitoba approved a Voluntary Service position to work for this new organization in the area of domestic violence within Mennonite communities.

Voices for Non-Violence began as a loosely structured, grass-roots organization formed in response to calls of healing from many individuals, families, congregations and conferences experiencing the pain of abuse. Voices for Non-Violence became registered as a non-profit organization in 1991.

Throughout its history, Voices for Non-Violence has served as a resource empowering congregations, raising awareness of the issues of violence and abuse within the Mennonite communities and has provided educational and practical support to those dealing with these issues. It has also developed a theologically grounded restorative approach in dealing with family violence and sexual abuse.

Throughout its history, Voices for Non-Violence has maintained an ongoing relationship with MCC. MCC Manitoba has provided various forms of support, including office space in Winnipeg. MCC Canada has offered educational development funds for some projects. Also, the Women's Concerns Committees and the Restorative Justice program have maintained close working relationships.

In 1993, Voices for Non-Violence received a substantial one-time only, two year federal government grant which enabled it to undertake a number of significant educational and direct service activities. At this time, a second office was located in Winkler, Manitoba, with as many as six staff persons (not all full time) working from both offices. Sustained financial support from within the Mennonite constituency groups or other funding bodies had become very difficult to nurture. Voices for Non-Violence reached a milestone in its journey. In 1998 the Board concluded that a new direction was required and decided to undertake a review of the organization to assist it in setting a new course.

As a result of significant discussion and discernment, it was determined that although much had been accomplished regarding awareness of abuse, it was also clear that most people were not getting the help they needed and that much work still needed to be done. Strong support was expressed for the continuation of an organization like Voices for Non-Violence and that the mandate be handed over to MCC Manitoba and/or Canada.

Since 2000, MCC Manitoba continues the vision for an end to violence and abuse with its ministry of Voices for Non-Violence. The seeds from the many years of work, programs, resources, people, workshops, conferences, and prayers have grown to produce fruits of justice with the fragrance of peace. Yet the work continues as the haunting pain of abuse continues. ♦

## LETTERS

**Editor's note:** The goal of this column is to offer a place for our readers to respond to the issues raised and the perspectives presented in *Report*. Although we try to print all letters, they may be shortened or edited to fit available space. All letters must be signed, but writers may request to have their names withheld.

### To the Editor:

I WAS VERY INTERESTED TO READ THE August–September issue of *Women's Concerns Report*. "Women who have left the church" is an intriguing topic for a church organization to address. I applaud the openness of those who seek to understand why some women leave a body that, in spite of its mission to love all people everywhere, does not always succeed in communicating love. Seeking the truth and openly communicating love are healthy things for the church to do.

When I read that permission had not been given for the editor to include an article from a lesbian, I was shocked. I wonder:

Why are certain issues "allowed" to be discussed and others not? What is there to fear in sharing diverse perspectives in a safe forum such as this publication, which is thoughtfully compiled and carefully edited before being distributed? Would the perspective of a lesbian shed light on truths that we would prefer to leave in the dark?

I respect MCC Women's Concerns for addressing this topic because it invites readers to question their own experiences. I hope that this newsletter continues to "push the envelope" in areas that challenge us all to be honest, open, and loving to all people everywhere.

**Celina Owen**  
Delta, British Columbia



## ACROSS THE GLOBE

**Consciousness-raising in Ukraine?** A women's "mercy group" has begun to meet at Kutuzovka Mennonite Church in southeastern Ukraine. The 10-member group, made up of mostly single mothers, meets monthly to discuss church and community needs and pray together. They also volunteer to visit sick and elderly people in the congregation. —*Maria Linder-Hess, MCC News Service, 01/09/2003.*

**Global Women's Strike.** Every March 8, since the year 2000, women and girls in 80 countries have gone on strike to stop the world and change it. The Global Women's Strike demands, among other things, payment for all caring work (raising children and caring for others), paid maternity leave, breast-feeding breaks, canceling the 'Third World debt,' clean water, healthcare, non-polluting energy and technology that shortens the hours we need to work. Visit <http://women-strike8m.server101.com> to find out more about how you can change the world on March 8. —*Global Women's Strike, Sept/Oct 2002.*

**Salvadoran women connect.** A group of 17 women from northern Morazán state, El Salvador, took a two-day trip this fall to visit and share ideas and stories with women in other parts of the country. The women visited La Línea, a community in San Martín, where they shared experi-

ences with two women's craft-making groups supported by MCC. In Soyapango, representatives of the community savings and loan groups Mujeres Para un Futuro Mejor (Women for a Better Future) welcomed the visitors with fresh "quesadilla" (a Salvadoran specialty cheese bread) and coffee. "Knowing that I will earn something for my savings, I am encouraged to put forth the effort to save," explained Miriam Martínez, a member of the community loan group. In each community they visited, the Morazán women presented a copy of the booklet "Tomamos La Palabra" ("We Speak Out"), a collection of their own life stories created with MCC support, as well as a product of their own skills, bread wrapped in an embroidered cloth; a knotted string sack; a crochet bag or a coin purse. —*Audrey Hess, MCC News Service, 12/06/2002.*

**Women in Mexico March for Justice.** More than 1,000 women marched through Mexico City on November 25, 2002 to protest the apathy towards the killing of more than 300 young girls and women in Ciudad Juarez. "Women in Black" were joined by families and friends of the victims as well as politicians and celebrities. Women in Black is an international peace network. Visit <http://balkansnet.org/wib/> to find out more. —*Common Dreams News Center, <http://www.commondreams.org>, reprint of an article by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), 11/26/2002.*

**Brethren in Christ Women Gather.** Sixty Brethren in Christ women from Pennsylvania and southern Ontario gathered January 7–9, 2003 for the Council for Brethren in Christ Women in Ministry and Leadership. The biennial event provides opportunity for networking, education and encouragement. In plenary sessions, three clergywomen addressed the theme, "God Like a Mother Eagle: Stirring, Hovering, Supporting." Workshops included "In Ministry Plus Being a Mom," "Using Language to Reflect our Beliefs" and "Women in Church Planting Ministry." The Brethren in Christ Church

has officially sanctioned women to pursue ministry and leadership since 1982. Currently, eleven women are ordained and 15 have a ministerial license. In July 2002, the first issue of *Diakonos: News and Resources for BIC Women in Ministry and Leadership* was printed. The quarterly newsletter keeps Brethren in Christ women and men informed and educated regarding the utilization of women's gifts in ministry and leadership in the Church. For a hard copy or electronic copy of the newsletter, contact Janet Peifer at [revimp@equalworth.net](mailto:revimp@equalworth.net) or at 156 Lake Meade Drive, East Berlin, PA 17316.

## NEWS VERBS

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#### **WOMEN'S CONCERNS REPORT**

### **Looking Forward**

**MAY-JUNE 2003**

**Women in Colombia**

**JULY-AUGUST 2003**

**Women's changing roles**

**SEPTEMBER-OCTOBER 2003**

**Theological grounding  
for gender equality**

**NOVEMBER-DECEMBER 2003**

**Looking forward**

**National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women.** On December 6, 2002, women and men across Canada gathered together to pause and reflect on acts of violence against women. The Day of Remembrance and Action was established in 1991 by the Parliament of Canada to commemorate the tragic deaths of 14 young women in Montreal who were shot because of their gender. It is also a day to reflect on concrete actions that each person can take to prevent and eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls. Various MCC Women's Concerns Committees across Canada participated in or planned commemorations of this day. In Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, seven women's agencies benefitted from the Lights Against Violence campaign in which lights were sold to light a large fir tree by an outdoor skating rink. Voices for Non-Violence, in Winnipeg, Manitoba, provided leadership for Services of Braiding Remembrance and Hope at Providence College and Seminary, MCC offices

and Canadian Mennonite University. The Women's Concerns Committee in Abbotsford, British Columbia, joined with a Women's Center at the local university in commemorating this day and invited local churches to attend the ceremony. *Some information drawn from [http://www.swc-cfc.gc.ca/dates/dec6/index\\_e.html](http://www.swc-cfc.gc.ca/dates/dec6/index_e.html).*

**Pastor Shortage?** For a number of years, people have decried the leadership void in our churches. However, part of this pastoral shortage is the Church's fault. Each month about one-third of the list of available pastoral candidates in Mennonite Church USA are women. Women continue to have more difficulty finding pastoral assignments than do male candidates. Mennonite, Brethren in Christ and Mennonite Brethren congregations are overlooking these gifted, trained and wonderful pastors. It is part of the sad news that not all congregations are open to women in leadership. —*Diane Zaerr Brenneman, The Mennonite, 12/24/2002.*